

February 22, 2022

To the Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am a pediatric emergency medicine physician who is writing to you in support of :  
HB. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

HB 5037 is an essential bill that will start to address the needs of thousands of children in Connecticut with behavioral health concerns and significant mental health illnesses. The cost and suffering of these children is high; this bill starts to address key aspects of care for them in a meaningful way.

As you may be aware, pediatric behavioral health has been an ongoing challenge for us to address on a state and national level. However, behavioral health emergencies have been significantly increasing since the COVID 19 pandemic began. I work at Yale New Haven Hospital where behavioral health concerns now account for up to 20% of the visits to our pediatric emergency department (PED). This rise in mental health patients has caused a significant burden on our PED resources, space and providers in a way we have never seen before. These kids are sicker and require more support than ever before. These kids present to the PED amidst a safety crisis whether they are either at risk of suicide or at risk of causing significant harm or injury to those around them. Once in our PED, they have long hours awaiting a behavioral health evaluation and then days to weeks before they are finally transitioned to an inpatient psychiatric bed for stabilization and treatment. These issues are pervasive in our hospital, at Connecticut Children's Hospital and throughout the state (<https://ctmirror.org/2021/05/25/children-with-psychiatric-needs-are-overwhelming-hospital-emergency-departments-in-ct/>)

HB 5037 will help to address this surge of acute behavioral health visits that is overwhelming our hospitals and our ability to care for our kids the way we should. HB 5037 will fund DMHAS \$3 million in FY 23 and FY 24 to support 24/7 coverage in privately provided mobile crisis teams. These mobile crisis teams can meet the patient in their homes and help triage which patients need emergency care and how to create safety plans outside of the hospital.

HB 5037 will also help ease the burden of those children that are awaiting emergency and inpatient treatment by providing \$1.6 million each year to help case management services for individuals awaiting treatment post-crisis. These essential services will help us link these children with the services they desperately need.

We need to help these children. HB 5037 is an important start. I urge you to pass this bill on their behalf.

Sincerely,  
Ammarah U Iqbal MD MPH  
New Haven CT